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Sixteenth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia

I. Introduction

1. By its resolution 1777 (2007) of 20 September 2007, the Security Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) until 30 September 2008 and requested me to monitor and report on the core benchmarks outlined in my report of 8 August 2007 (S/2007/479) by 20 March 2008. The present report provides an update on major developments in Liberia, including progress made in meeting the benchmarks for the drawdown phase of the UNMIL consolidation, drawdown and withdrawal plan.

II. Major developments since September 2007

A. Political situation

2. The overall political situation in Liberia remained stable during the reporting period. On 28 January, in her State of the Republic annual address to the legislature, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf stated that the country had an economic growth rate of 9 per cent and that revenue collection for the first 11 months of 2007 amounted to $163.3 million, which surpassed the projected annual target of $152.5. The President also advised that the World Bank and the African Development Bank had cleared over $671 million of the $4.8 billion debt arrears of Liberia and that the Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund had agreed to a financing arrangement that would forgive some $920 million of Liberia's debts. In addition, the President stated that considerable progress had been made in rebuilding infrastructure and delivering basic services. She underscored the need for a comprehensive constitutional review, which would address, inter alia, decentralization, land reform and term limits for the President and legislators. She also stressed the importance of creating a new Liberia, which would replace the divisions, marginalization and exclusions of the past with inclusiveness, equitable opportunities and the empowerment of all Liberians.

3. In further efforts to foster political and ethnic reconciliation, President Johnson-Sirleaf attended a national peace festival in Monrovia on 2 January, where, together with George Weah, former presidential candidate for the Congress for Democratic Change, she lit a torch for peace and highlighted the need for national

reconciliation. On 28 January, the President announced her intention to pardon George Koukou, former Speaker of the National Transitional Legislative Assembly, who was on trial for treason. However, she stated that the trial of two other individuals accused of treason should continue.

4. On 7 October 2007, the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Angela Merkel, visited Liberia, where she pledged an additional €4 million towards Liberia's development programme and promised the continued support of Germany for Liberia's efforts to obtain multilateral debt relief. On 21 February, the President of the United States of America, George W. Bush, visited Liberia, where he held discussions with President Johnson-Sirleaf on the progress being made in the areas of health care, education, social services and infrastructural development in the country. This was the first visit by a United States President to the country in 30 years. President Bush pledged the continued support of his Government for peacekeeping and reconstruction efforts in Liberia, as well as for the security sector reform programme of the country. He also announced that his Government would provide one million textbooks for schoolchildren, as well as desks and chairs for 10,000 students for the next academic year.

5. In September 2007, the draft asset freeze act, which was submitted to the legislature in July 2007, was rejected by the House of Representatives on the grounds that its provisions violated the Liberian Constitution. In response, the President reiterated her commitment to the principles of the proposed act, and affirmed that she would pursue other options in conformity with the laws of the country to implement resolution 1532 (2004), by which the Council requested States to freeze the assets of senior officials of the regime of the former President of Liberia, Charles Taylor. The draft act had sought to provide for the freezing, seizure or confiscation of assets owned by those individuals listed by the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1521 (2003) concerning Liberia, as well as those individuals who had derived illegal benefits from public positions or services.

6. The trial of Charles Gyude Bryant, former Chairman of the National Transitional Government of Liberia, who was charged with economic sabotage for misappropriating $1.3 million, continued during the reporting period. On 3 March, the Minister of Justice announced on national radio that the Government had failed to reach an out-of-court settlement with Mr. Bryant to discontinue his trial in exchange for the return of the misappropriated funds. The trial of Edwin Snowe, former Speaker of the House of Representatives, who was indicted for the theft of some $1 million of public funds from the Liberia Petroleum Refining Company during his tenure as Managing Director, also continued during the reporting period.

7. Relations between the executive branch of the Government and the legislature continued to improve. During the reporting period, the legislature passed several important bills, including the Governance Commission Act. The legislature is currently reviewing the Anti-corruption Commission Act, the Code of Conduct Act, an act amending the Investment Incentives and Revenues Codes, and an act to amend the Penal Law. During the period under review, the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives began public hearings to investigate allegations made in January 2007 by the former House Speaker, Mr. Snowe, that members of the House had received $5,000 inducements from the executive branch of Government to sign a resolution calling for his removal. At the hearing on 3 March, Mr. Snowe

provided audio recordings in which four legislators allegedly admitted receiving $5,000 each to remove him as Speaker.

8. UNMIL continued to support Government efforts to restructure the political party system. In this regard, on 18 and 19 March, in collaboration with the Governance Commission, the National Elections Commission, the International Republican Institute and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), UNMIL facilitated a two-day workshop on political party system reform for representatives of political parties and members of the legislature.

B. Security situation

9. The overall security situation in Liberia remained calm and stable. However, during the reporting period, several violent civil disturbances took place on rubber plantations. On 17 November 2007, a Belgian manager of the Liberia Agricultural Company rubber plantation in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County, was shot dead. The shooting occurred following the signing of an agreement between the Government and the Company for the latter to acquire land surrounding the plantation. On 24 January, five unidentified men burned three houses and killed one resident in Zinakpah village on the plantation.

10. On 22 November 2007, during a student march to protest inadequate facilities and education materials at the main school on Guthrie rubber plantation, protestors destroyed rubber-tapping equipment and damaged two houses owned by the plantation management. On 16 January, the plantation workers staged a demonstration to protest delays in the payment of salaries and the non-provision of social services by the interim management team. On 24 January, the interim management team, which was constituted by the Rubber Planters' Association of Liberia, was suspended as a result of continued tensions on the plantation.

11. On 5 December 2007, workers at the Firestone Rubber Plantation went on strike to protest the non-payment of promised salary increases by the Company management and the alleged unwillingness of the Government to recognize the elected members of the workers' union. The strike action turned violent on 6 December 2007, when 150 workers, armed with cutlasses, axes and single barrel shotguns, blocked access to roads on the plantation, looted the health centre, burned down offices and destroyed company property. UNMIL and the Liberian National Police responded to restore calm. However, tensions ceased only after the Supreme Court issued a ruling upholding the validity of the workers' union elections.

12. Other significant security-related developments during the reporting period included violent protests by various groups. On 17 September 2007, some 150 servicemen of the former Armed Forces of Liberia, the Special Security Service and the Liberian National Police demonstrated in Monrovia over the non-payment of outstanding benefits. They obstructed traffic and threw stones at an UNMIL police vehicle, damaging its windshield. Also on 16 and 17 January 2008, a group of former personnel of the Armed Forces of Liberia staged a violent protest against the demolition of illegal structures in the area surrounding the Barclay Training Centre in Monrovia. Five Liberian National Police officers were injured by stones thrown by the protesters.

13. On 16 October 2007, a crowd, which had gathered at the Buchanan police station in Grand Bassa County to demand the release of three murder suspects, turned violent. On 13 February, a police station in Tappita, Nimba County, was burned by a mob demanding the release of a murder suspect. These incidents were effectively managed by the Liberian National Police assisted by UNMIL.

14. Continued criminal activities, including armed robbery and rape, particularly in Monrovia and its environs, generated a lack of public confidence in the ability of the Liberian National Police to effectively perform its duties. To address the situation, UNMIL increased the number of mobile and foot patrols in the high crime areas of Monrovia. In addition, in December 2007, the Mission temporarily deployed 37 United Nations police advisers and staff officers to reinforce UNMIL/ Liberian National Police patrols in Monrovia.

15. During the reporting period, UNMIL assisted the National Security Council with the development of a national security strategy and operational plan. The strategy focuses on coordinating information among law enforcement and security agencies, as well as strengthening community and police cooperation through information-sharing. The Minister of Justice is also leading efforts to improve police community relations. In this regard, the Ministry of Justice and the Liberian National Police provided cell phones to several residents in Monrovia to enhance their ability to provide timely information on criminal activities in their communities.

16. The security situation along the borders with Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea remained stable during the reporting period. UNMIL continued to conduct several operations to deter possible cross-border movement of weapons and recruitment of mercenaries, as well as to reassure the local population and foster better coordination among security agencies deployed in the border areas. The Mission conducted regular concurrent patrols with the Guinean armed forces along the Liberian-Guinean border in "Operation Seskin". Similar concurrent patrols were conducted along the Liberian-Sierra Leonean border with the Sierra Leone armed forces in "Operation Loko". In addition, special operations were conducted along the Sierra Leone-Liberia border during the August 2007 presidential and parliamentary elections in Sierra Leone. UNMIL also continued to conduct coordinated patrols with the United Nations Operations in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) to monitor the security situation along the Liberian-Ivorian border.

III. Mission deployment

A. Military component

17. As of 1 March, the UNMIL troop strength stood at 12,948, out of an authorized strength of 15,125. During the period under review, UNMIL continued to provide security throughout Liberia. The Mission undertook several cordon and search operations to retrieve weapons, extended support to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) community arms collection for development programme, carried out air and ground patrols, especially along Liberia's borders and assisted in the rehabilitation of roads and bridges. In addition, the Mission embarked on a number of humanitarian activities, including the rehabilitation and

building of schools, the construction of parks and the provision of free medical services.

18. UNMIL also continued to provide security to the Special Court for Sierra Leone. The quick reaction force of the Mission conducted "Exercise Blue Fish" from 8 to 12 October 2007 and "Exercise Green Horizon", with the support of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces and the Sierra Leone Police, from 3 to 7 December 2007, in order to reinforce security at the Special Court. Given that the mandate of the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) is expected to expire on 30 September 2008, UNMIL is taking steps to ensure that its military guard force assigned to the Special Court for Sierra Leone is provided with adequate administrative and logistical support for its operations after the departure of UNIOSIL.

B. Police component

19. As at 1 March, the police strength of the Mission stood at 1,194 officers, out of an authorized ceiling of 1,240 officers, which includes 564 United Nations police advisers, 603 officers in five formed police units, 21 corrections officers and 6 immigration officers. On 18 September 2007, the United States deployed four police specialists to the Liberian National Police headquarters. It also deployed on 7 December 2007 a project manager to oversee the development of the Emergency Response Unit.

IV. Status of implementation of the mandate of the Mission

A. Rebuilding the Liberian National Police

20. As indicated in my last report (S/2007/479), UNMIL achieved its initial target of providing basic training for 3,500 police officers by 30 June 2007. To date, 3,662 officers have graduated from the National Police Academy. The first all-female class, comprising 110 police recruits, graduated in December 2007, bringing the total number of women in the police force to 361 (10 per cent). On 14 January, the thirty-third class of 150 recruits, including 115 women, some of whom have completed the special Ministry of Education/Liberian National Police/United Nations Police educational support programme, commenced training. In addition, several advanced programmes designed to strengthen the supervisory and specialized capacities of personnel of the Liberian National Police and Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization were completed. The Federal Republic of Germany has donated €1 million to the Liberian National Police to support its further training.

21. The first class of 90 officers, including one woman, of the Emergency Response Unit has commenced training. A second class is expected to begin training in July. It is envisaged that the first 200 officers of the 500-strong Emergency Response Unit will become operational by July 2009. The United States and Ireland are providing $5 million and $1.4 million respectively to the Government of Liberia for the development of the Emergency Response Unit.

22. Some 90 per cent of Liberian National Police officers authorized to be deployed to the counties have been deployed. Nevertheless, county operations

continue to be hampered by the lack of basic infrastructure and police equipment, including vehicles and communications; a lack of funds to procure fuel for electric generators and vehicles, where available; and the persistent absence of officers from their posts. In order to address the high rate of absenteeism and other disciplinary matters within the police force, four experienced United Nations police specialists have been deployed to UNMIL to serve as professional standards advisers. In addition, steps are being taken to revise the police duty manual, streamline the operational framework for the Police Standards and Practices Unit and verify the numbers and locations of Liberian National Police personnel in order to correct the payroll.

23. The Government is receiving support from its international partners to address the logistical challenges facing the Liberian National Police. As a result of this assistance, police stations in Harper in Maryland County, Kakata in Margibi County and Gbarnga in Bong County have been renovated and equipped. The construction of the county police headquarters in Zwedru in Grand Gedeh County, Barclayville in Grand Kru County and Harper in Maryland County, as well as a rural police station in Sanniquellie in Nimba County, have been completed and handed over to the Liberian National Police, while county police headquarters in River Gee and River Cess counties are in the process of being constructed. The renovation of the female dormitory and offices and the construction of a new male dormitory and classrooms at the National Police Training Academy have also been completed.

24. With assistance from UNMIL quick-impact projects, the reconstruction and rehabilitation of police stations in Gbah in Bomi County, Bopolu in Gbarpolu County, Toe Town in Grand Gedeh County, Foya and Kolahun in Lofa County, Ganta in Nimba County and Webbo in River Gee have been completed. In addition, the construction and rehabilitation of police stations in Sinje in Grand Cape Mount County, Morweh and Neuzen in River Cess County and AFC-Khan Town in Sinoe County are under way. Belgium and Germany are also providing funds for the construction of police barracks in nine counties, including Lofa, Grand Cape Mount, Nimba, Grand Gedeh, River Gee, Maryland, Bong, River Cess and Grand Kru. Notwithstanding these efforts, many police stations still require urgent rehabilitation.

25. In February, a newly constructed immigration office funded by UNMIL quick-impact projects was handed over to the Government in Ganta, Nimba County. Work will soon commence on two other immigration stations located at Bolongodou Port in Lofa County and Geplaken Border Port in River Gee County. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has agreed to construct immigration border posts in Yekepa Port in Nimba County, Bo Waterside Port in Grand Cape Mount County, Harper in Maryland County and Voinjama in Lofa County. Some 28 immigration border posts still require infrastructure and equipment support.

26. The Netherlands Immigration Service, the Ghana Immigration Service and UNMIL are providing training to personnel of the Bureau for Immigration and Naturalization. Currently, four immigration officers are undergoing basic training at the Ghana Immigration Service Academy. In addition, the Government of France has donated two vehicles, five motorcycles, computers and uniforms to strengthen the capacity of the Bureau along the Liberia-Côte d'Ivoire border, while the International Organization for Migration has donated equipment to assist with

immigration services at the Roberts International Airport. The Bureau has estimated that it will need $2.7 million for the deactivation of its officers. Currently, only 727 of the 1,228 Bureau for Immigration and Naturalization officers meet the basic eligibility requirements for enlistment in the Liberian security services.

B. Training, restructuring and reform of the Armed Forces of Liberia

27. The United States continued to lead international support for the training and restructuring of the 2,000-strong Armed Forces of Liberia. During the period under review, it made significant headway in training new recruits. On 7 September 2007, a second batch of 502 recruits graduated from the Barclay Training Centre in Monrovia, while a third batch consisting of 485 recruits graduated from Camp Ware on 11 January, bringing the total number of trained recruits to 1,124. On 14 January 2008, graduates began attending an advanced infantry individual training course at Camp Ware. Training of the fourth batch of 525 recruits, including 25 women, commenced on 8 March at Camp Ware.

28. On 10 December, three rifle companies of the First Infantry Battalion of the Armed Forces of Liberia were activated at a ceremony presided over by President Johnson-Sirleaf. Three officers from Benin, Ghana and Nigeria were seconded to the Liberian Ministry of Defence to assist in the command and control of those units. Meanwhile, some 15 Armed Forces of Liberia personnel are undergoing officer and specialist training at Nigerian military institutions. Several officers have already benefited from specialist training in China, Germany and the United States.

C. Development of a national security strategy and architecture

29. During the reporting period, a national security strategy containing proposals for an accountable security architecture and a regulatory framework was developed. The strategy focuses on improving the coordination and oversight of multiagency security activities, outlining the statutory instruments that govern these activities, and providing for the accountability, sustainability, financing and operational efficacy of these agencies. A draft implementation strategy is also being developed.

D. Reintegration of ex-combatants

30. In December 2007, UNDP and the National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Rehabilitation, in collaboration with UNMIL, began implementing a one-year reintegration and rehabilitation programme for a final group of some 8,700 ex-combatants registered under the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration programme, who have not yet benefited from any reintegration and rehabilitation programme. The Government of Norway has provided $7 million to implement the programme, which is expected to enhance the employability of beneficiaries through market-relevant training, apprenticeships or job placement.

31. UNMIL continued to collect and destroy residual weapons and ammunition voluntarily surrendered or discovered through search operations. Since the end of the disarmament and demobilization programme in 2005, a total of 884 weapons,

1,754 pieces of unexploded ordnance, 108,838 rounds of ammunition and 12,002 assorted spares and miscellaneous parts have been collected and destroyed by UNMIL. The UNDP community arms collection programme has collected 354 rifles, 40,141 rounds of ammunition, 967 spare parts and 872 pieces of unexploded ordnance since its launch in January 2006.

E. Consolidation of State authority

32. Progress in restoring and consolidating State authority throughout the country continued at a slow pace. The county support teams, which were established to ensure a coherent and consolidated United Nations approach to supporting the Government of Liberia at the county level, continued to meet on a monthly basis in all 15 counties to develop action plans to address the needs of each county.

33. During the period under review, the Government, with the support of the United Nations and other international partners, organized a series of consultations at the district and county levels to determine priorities for incorporation into the poverty reduction strategy of the country. This Strategy is expected to shape the national recovery and development agenda over the next three years. During the consultations, all counties highlighted roads and basic infrastructure as their top priority needs. Education, water and local economic development issues were also identified as major priorities.

34. During the reporting period, delays were experienced in rehabilitating county administrative buildings owing to the logistical and capacity constraints of implementing partners. Of the 11 buildings identified for rehabilitation, only four structures in Montserrado, Margibi, River Cess and River Gee Counties were completed and handed over to the Government. The rehabilitation of the administrative building in Grand Bassa County was also completed with funds provided by USAID. The rehabilitation and construction of three administrative buildings in Gbarpolu, Bomi and Grand Kru Counties are currently ongoing. Notwithstanding the progress being made in rehabilitating these structures, the work of the county officials and government line ministry representatives continues to be seriously hampered by the lack of communications and office equipment, as well as accommodation, vehicles and good roads.

35. Between March and October 2007, some 1,200 local government officials representing all 15 counties benefited from civic education training, which was jointly conducted by the Government, the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and donors. The training focused on leadership, national identity, transparency, accountability, human rights, the Millennium Development Goals, peacebuilding and reconciliation.

36. The United Nations country team and UNMIL are assisting the Liberia Institute for Statistics and Geo-Information Services with its preparations to conduct a national census from 21 to 27 March. It will be the first census to be conducted by the Government of Liberia since 1984. UNMIL has trained 156 field officers on the use of the global positioning system and has provided topographic and satellite maps to the Institute. UNMIL will also provide logistical support to facilitate the census process.

F. Promoting efficient management of natural resources

37. As part of the Government efforts to regain control over and efficiently manage the natural resources of the country, the Forestry Development Authority has signed a management contract with a Swiss firm aimed at discouraging the illegal production of timber and ensuring that exported forest products meet international standards. The process of submitting the 10 core regulations of the Authority for public review has also been completed. To date, some 85 local and foreign firms have indicated interest in participating in commercial logging. In the meantime, the Government has set up an inter-ministerial forestry concessions committee to, inter alia, review concession agreements, approve reports of the concessions bid evaluation panel and prepare an annual concessions plan for its approval.

38. Liberia resumed exporting rough diamonds in September 2007. In November 2007, Liberia attended its first Kimberley Process Certification Scheme plenary in Brussels. Meanwhile, the Government continued its efforts to reorganize the diamond sector by converting the Government Diamonds Office into the Office of Precious Minerals, and the Presidential Task Force on Diamonds into the Liberian Diamond Board. It also completed a draft mineral policy and is working towards the establishment of a mining cadastre system.

39. UNMIL continued to support the efforts of the Government to re-establish its control and provide social services on Liberia's rubber plantations, as recommended by the joint Government of Liberia/UNMIL Rubber Plantation Task Force. In this regard, emergency repairs have been undertaken on the access roads leading to the Sinoe Rubber Plantation, which has been illegally operated by ex-combatants for several years. These repairs are expected to facilitate the deployment of UNMIL troops on the plantation and enable the establishment of an interim management team. On 1 December 2007, the Cavalla Rubber Plantation was handed over to its legally recognized owners, bringing an end to the tenure of the interim management team established in May 2006.

40. During the reporting period, the Mission's Environment and Natural Resources Unit provided technical support to the Environmental Protection Agency for the review of the national environmental policy and legislative framework, as well as environmental impact assessment regulations. In addition, as part of its efforts to strengthen the capacity of the Environmental Protection Agency, UNMIL trained 30 personnel of the Agency as environmental inspectors. The trained personnel will soon be assigned to the counties.

G. Promotion of human rights and the rule of law

Promotion of human rights

41. Although the overall human rights situation in the country continues to improve, deficiencies in the justice system still pose serious challenges to efforts to promote and protect human rights. These deficiencies include recurring absenteeism and reports of corrupt practices involving judicial and law enforcement officials; detention facilities that are below minimum human rights standards; large numbers of pretrial detainees awaiting trial for extended periods; and insufficient numbers of

qualified corrections officers. As a result of these problems, protests by inmates increased during the reporting period.

42. Despite the enactment of the Rape Amendment Act in 2006, the incidence of rape of women and girls continues to be high. Moreover, the prosecution of cases of sexual violence is hampered by deficiencies in the criminal justice system and the regular dismissal of cases owing to out-of-court settlements made between the victims and the perpetrators of the crimes.

43. The legislature is currently reviewing the Act to establish the independent national commission on human rights. With the passage of this Act and the appointment of the commissioners, the commission is expected to become fully functional. In the meantime, the Ministry of Justice is making preparations to develop a national human rights action plan.

Support for the judicial and correction system

44. The reform of the judicial and corrections system continues to be slow. The justice system remains constrained by the lack of infrastructure, inadequate numbers of qualified judicial and legal officers, lack of capacity to process cases, poor case management, inadequately trained court staff, low salaries, lack of a legal and judicial reform policy framework and a legal regime that allows only Liberian citizens to be legal practitioners or judges. As a result of these shortcomings, many Liberians have little confidence in the justice system. UNMIL is working actively with the Ministry of Justice and the Supreme Court to try to address these deficiencies. The Mission is also an active participant in the working groups of the Liberia Reconstruction and Development Committee on governance and the rule of law, and has advocated for the inclusion of legal and judicial reforms, including juvenile justice system reforms, in the poverty reduction strategy of Liberia.

45. During the reporting period, the Mission continued its monitoring, advisory and capacity-building activities. It used increasingly the services of national facilitators and provided training for national trainers who will assist in building the capacity of the legal and judicial system. Moreover, the Mission is supporting Government efforts to establish a law reform commission as a sustainable mechanism for law reform and development; establish a judicial training institute; reconstruct courthouses; create a national judicial database; reform the judicial scholarship scheme to attract qualified indigent students to the Louis Arthur Grimes School of Law of the University of Liberia; and review mechanisms related to judicial discipline, court fees, and bail bonds.

46. With respect to the corrections system, UNMIL continued to train personnel of the Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation to provide security at correctional facilities. So far, UNMIL has recruited and trained 209 corrections officers. Some 69 of these officers are currently undergoing practical training at corrections facilities, while 10 officers have completed a training-of-trainers programme. Some 29 corrections officers were deactivated during the first phase of a United States-funded deactivation process. Another 35 officers have been earmarked for deactivation during the second phase of the process.

47. Most correction facilities, including the Monrovia Central Prison, are either overcrowded or are operating at full capacity. The majority of prisoners are pretrial detainees who have been waiting for long periods for their cases to be heard in

court. In an effort to decongest the Monrovia Central Prison, a new block was constructed with funds provided by the United States and Norway. In addition, the recently renovated prison facility in Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County, has begun accepting sentenced prisoners. The Liberian National Police will be deployed to this facility shortly to further enhance security. UNMIL is currently making efforts to activate prison workshops and develop activities to rehabilitate prisoners.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

48. Since my last report, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has made significant progress in implementing its mandate. The Commission commenced public hearings nationwide in Monrovia on 8 January. President Johnson-Sirleaf, who addressed the opening of the hearings, called on Liberians to respond positively to the Commission requests to attend hearings and to provide truthful testimonies. The President also apologized to the people of Liberia on behalf of all Governments of Liberia for the acts that contributed to the conflict and reiterated the support of the Government for the Commission. Since the hearings started, a number of perpetrators and victims have appeared before the Commission to give accounts of the violations and abuses perpetrated or suffered during the war.

49. On 31 January, the Commission completed public hearings in Monrovia and began holding hearings in the counties. Some 30 witnesses are expected to testify in each county. On 12 and 18 February, respectively, the Commission began holding public hearings in Maryland and Grand Kru Counties. The Commission has so far received $4.2 million out of a projected operating budget of $9 million. UNMIL is working closely with the Commission to ensure the successful completion of its mandate.

H. Economic governance

50. The Government of Liberia continued to make progress in implementing the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme. In the last quarter of 2007, progress was made in installing internal control systems and new software in the Ministry of Finance, submitting the draft act on the establishment of an anti-corruption commission to the legislature, formulating a framework document for the Government's 10-year capacity development strategy and developing an enhanced communication strategy. In addition, during the reporting period, the Economic Governance Steering Committee approved the terms of reference for the long-term adviser to the Bureau of Customs and Excise and the Special Adviser to the Central Bank of Liberia. Experts were also recruited for key economic institutions, including the Bureau of Customs and Excise, the National Port Authority and the Central Bank of Liberia.

I. National recovery, reconstruction and development

51. The Ministry of Public Works, UNMIL, UNDP and the World Bank are jointly providing short-term employment opportunities for Liberians and repairing critical Mission supply routes through road rehabilitation projects. In addition, a number of community residents and ex-combatants are benefiting from the rehabilitation of secondary and feeder roads by UNMIL engineers. With the assistance of the World

Food Programme "Food support to local initiatives" programme and the Ministry of Public Works, UNMIL is also facilitating the employment of community residents in roadside brushing and other basic road repair works.

52. During the reporting period, President Johnson-Sirleaf launched the second phase of the emergency power programme, which will provide electricity to some parts of Monrovia and its environs.

53. In October 2007, I declared Liberia eligible to receive funding under the second window of the Peacebuilding Fund. As a result, $15 million was allocated for peacebuilding projects aimed at promoting national reconciliation and conflict management; peacebuilding and conflict resolution; and strengthening the State capacity for peace consolidation. While UNDP is responsible for administering the Fund, a joint steering committee, co-chaired by the Government and UNMIL, will be responsible for the review and approval of projects. The committee will be supported by an in-country technical advisory panel.

J. Humanitarian activities

54. Although the humanitarian situation in Liberia has continued to improve, the country still faces serious challenges, particularly in the health, education, food, and water and sanitation sectors. So far only 62 per cent of the $110 million needed to address the high priority humanitarian needs outlined in the Common Humanitarian Action Plan, including the delivery of basic social services, the provision of productive livelihoods for returnee communities and the strengthening of civil society and local authorities, has been received. During the reporting period, UNMIL organized a number of medical outreach activities, which provided medical treatment for some 24,000 patients.

55. During the period under review, UNHCR conducted a post-voluntary repatriation verification exercise, which revealed that 75,509 registered Liberian refugees are still residing in various countries in the subregion. There are also 10,327 refugees from Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire and other countries residing in Liberia. The United Nations, in collaboration with the Economic Community of West African States and the Government of Liberia, is trying to find durable solutions for the integration of Sierra Leonean refugees in Liberia. The successful reintegration of returnees into communities continues to be a major challenge.

K. Gender

56. As part of the United Nations Gender Theme Group, UNMIL is supporting Government efforts to develop a national gender policy and to prepare a report on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in Liberia. Within the Mission, the Gender Advisory Unit provided gender training for peacekeeping personnel and developed a mission-wide action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), as part of its internal mainstreaming function. The Unit also conducted capacity-building training on gender analysis and mainstreaming for Government ministries and agencies.

L. HIV/AIDS

57. The UNMIL HIV/AIDS Unit continued to collaborate with the Mission's integrated training cell to carry out HIV/AIDS awareness training and sensitization, as well as personal risk assessment sessions as part of the induction training for military, police, and civilian personnel. It also continued to promote HIV/AIDS awareness in Liberia, through its participation in a live UNMIL phone-in programme. In addition, the Unit conducted HIV/AIDS sensitization for 175 members of the Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd in Paynesville, a suburb of Monrovia. A similar sensitization programme was conducted for 1,111 recruits of the Armed Forces of Liberia and 67 corrections officers undergoing training at the National Police Academy.

M. Personnel conduct and discipline

58. The Mission's Conduct and Discipline Unit continued to work on developing strategies to prevent, identify, report and effectively respond to all categories of United Nations personnel misconduct. It also continued to emphasize the zero tolerance policy of the Secretary-General on sexual exploitation and abuse in its training and awareness-raising campaigns. Moreover, the Unit assisted the Government with the coordination of its national sexual exploitation and abuse and awareness campaign, which was launched in December 2006.

59. During the reporting period, three cases of sexual exploitation and abuse, 14 "category 1" (serious misconduct) and 101 "category 2" (minor misconduct) misconduct cases were reported. Investigations of the three cases of sexual exploitation and abuse are ongoing. UNMIL published a biannual bulletin on the status of reported cases in January 2008.

N. Public information

60. The UNMIL Public Information Office continued to support the priority programmes of the Mission, as well as those of the United Nations agencies, the Government of Liberia and civil society, aimed at consolidating peace and stability, encouraging reconciliation and promoting national recovery. The Mission organized a series of public outreach events and radio programmes on sexual exploitation and abuse, HIV/AIDS and the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In addition, it organized workshops for senior editors and on creative writing, and development journalism, which has since led to the formation of the Liberian Association of Development Journalism. During the reporting period, UNMIL Radio developed and broadcast seven new programmes, including "Our teachers, our schools", in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and USAID, which focuses on improving the quality of education and "What's your problem?", a psychosocial counselling programme that addresses the issues of reconciliation and forgiveness.

V. Drawdown of the Mission

61. The consolidation phase of the UNMIL consolidation, drawdown and withdrawal plan formally ended on 31 December 2007. Some progress was made in meeting the indicators of progress identified under the four key benchmarks of security, the rule of law and governance, economic revitalization, and basic services and infrastructure during the consolidation phase. However, progress was slow in some areas, particularly in the strengthening of the justice sector, the training of the Armed Forces of Liberia, the development of a national security strategy and architecture, and the establishment of an independent national human rights commission. UNMIL will continue to monitor the progress made in meeting these benchmarks during the drawdown phase of the UNMIL consolidation, drawdown and withdrawal plan. The benchmarks for the drawdown phase, together with the indicators of progress, are provided in annex I to the present report.

A. Military component

62. Under resolution 1777 (2007), the Security Council approved my recommendation to reduce the military component of UNMIL by some 2,450 troops between October 2007 and September 2008. Accordingly, one infantry battalion from Namibia was withdrawn from UNMIL on 7 October 2007. A company from the Pakistani battalion was deployed to the vacated locations. On 8 February, one battalion from the Bangladeshi contingent commenced its withdrawal from UNMIL. A reduced Ghanaian battalion will cover the vacated area. Another battalion from Senegal will be repatriated in June 2008, to be replaced by a smaller battalion from Ethiopia. In addition, the Ghanaian and Nigerian battalions, which are currently being rotated, will be reduced by one company each. It is envisaged that by 30 September, some 2,450 troops will have been repatriated, leaving the Mission troop strength at 11,691.

B. Police component

63. In compliance with resolution 1777 (2007), the police component will begin its drawdown in April. It is expected that 498 police advisers will depart the Mission in seven stages between April 2008 and December 2010, bringing the police strength to 742 personnel by December 2010.

C. Civilian component

64. The Mission will continue to adjust its civilian component, as appropriate, to adapt to evolving priorities. In view of the progress made in the reintegration of ex-combatants and in the transition from the emergency humanitarian phase to the early recovery phase, the Mission has made adjustments to its reintegration, rehabilitation and recovery section, as well as to its humanitarian coordination section.

VI. Observations

65. The Government of Liberia continues to focus on the important priorities of ensuring economic recovery; obtaining forgiveness of the country's indebtedness; fighting corruption; implementing its interim poverty reduction strategy; revitalizing the agricultural sector; restoring basic services; rehabilitating basic infrastructure, including roads; and renovating and building schools, clinics, hospitals and administrative buildings. In addition, the Government is making progress in implementing the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme; reforming the security sector; regaining control and efficient management of its natural resources; strengthening the capacity of its institutions; and consolidating its authority throughout the country. It is also taking commendable steps to engage all Liberian stakeholders in the poverty reduction strategy process.

66. Despite these encouraging developments, a number of tasks that are critical to the sustainability of peace and stability still have to be fully implemented. These include the reform of the legal and judicial system, the reintegration of war-affected populations and the extension of the rule of law throughout the country. In addition, Liberia still faces significant reconstruction and development challenges, including pervasive poverty, food insecurity, high unemployment, massive illiteracy, poor infrastructure and the inadequate delivery of basic services, including potable water, health services and education. Moreover, in spite of the efforts of the Government, corruption still remains a major concern.

67. While significant progress has been made in the restructuring and training of the police, the deployment and operations of the force are still hampered by a lack of vehicles, communications equipment and accommodation. I appeal to donors to generously support the equipment and deployment needs of the Liberian National Police. I am pleased that the training of personnel of the new Armed Forces of Liberia is building momentum and that the training of the new police Emergency Response Unit has commenced. The Government should accelerate the development of its security strategy and architecture, which will enable it to set out a coherent road map for assuming security responsibility for the country.

68. A fair and effective judicial system is one key element in avoiding a return to conflict in Liberia. Although the steps that have been taken by the Government to reform the judicial sector and to strengthen the rule of law are encouraging, much more needs to be done. In this regard, the Government needs to address the long-standing structural challenges facing the justice sector by adopting a comprehensive approach and far-reaching reforms. In addition, a major overhaul of the judicial and corrections system is required to increase access to justice and to alleviate the unnecessary suffering of detainees and prisoners. I urge international partners to support the Government in this endeavour.

69. I am concerned about the high numbers of unemployed youth, including former combatants, who continue to pose a potential threat to stability in the country. It will be important for all stakeholders to work together to provide sustainable employment opportunities for the unemployed. I take this opportunity to express my appreciation to international partners and donors who are supporting reintegration and rehabilitation programmes for former combatants and creating employment opportunities for the people of Liberia.

70. The Government has made commendable efforts to regain control of diamond mining. However, additional measures will need to be taken to ensure that the diamond industry is effectively regulated. It will also be important for the Government to establish a computerized data bank for mining licences, review incentives and remuneration for the field staff of the Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy and increase efforts to ensure that banking channels are used for all diamond transactions.

71. It is gratifying to note that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has commenced its public hearings after almost six months of suspension of its work. I call on the people of Liberia to attend the hearings and provide the Commission with their testimonies. It is my hope that this process will form part of a broader national reconciliation process that will also address past human rights abuses. As the Commission still needs urgent financial assistance to complete its work, I call on members of the international community to provide funding for the Commission.

72. In conclusion, I wish to express my deep appreciation to all the troop- and police-contributing countries, as well as to ECOWAS, the African Union and the International Contact Group on Liberia, for their continued support in consolidating peace in Liberia. I would also like to extend my thanks to my new Special Representative, Ellen Margrethe Løj, her predecessor, Alan Doss, and all UNMIL military, police and civilian personnel, all development and humanitarian agencies, and the numerous bilateral donors and non-governmental organizations for their important contribution to the peace consolidation process in Liberia.

Annex I

Benchmarks for phase 2 of the consolidation, drawdown and withdrawal of UNMIL

Drawdown phase

Benchmarks	Indicators of progress
Security[a]	
Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) operational[b]	1st AFL battalion conducts squad/platoon level exercises with UNMIL
	1st AFL battalion conducts company level exercises with UNMIL
	Government of Liberia declares 1st AFL battalion operational
	2nd AFL battalion conducts squad/platoon level exercises with UNMIL
	2nd AFL battalion conducts company level exercises with UNMIL
	Government of Liberia declares 2nd AFL battalion operational
Liberia National Police operational	Nationwide implementation of administrative and operating procedures completed
	Oversight mechanism established
	500-member Emergency Response Unit operational
	Human resource quality improvement through officer competency validation/fitness certification by United Nations police (integrity and skill-based) with Inspector General of Police and Ministry of Justice
	Operational capacity improved through police infrastructure enhancement, logistics support and equipment provision at county police stations to ensure support for sustained Liberia National Police deployments and enhanced operational capacity
	Realignment of Liberia National Police county police station security coverage, inter alia, through reinforcement of Liberia National Police personnel in identified high-threat areas
National security strategy and architecture operational	National security strategy and architecture designed and fully implemented

	Security coordination mechanisms operational nationally and in each county
Security sector budgetary support enhanced	Government of Liberia progressively increases its annual budgetary allocation for security sector reform in national budget
Control and monitoring of movement across borders operational	Deactivation of non-qualified personnel from Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization completed
	Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization capacity increased through electronic tracking and monitoring of passengers at Roberts International Airport
	Trained officers present at 36 official international entry points and 36 outposts operational
Reintegration of ex-combatants	Rehabilitation and reintegration programme completed
Economic revitalization[c]	
Implementation of Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme	Public finance management and governance reforms agreed with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) under the staff-monitored or successor programme completed
	Government spending limits observed in line with the budget targets agreed with IMF
	Transparent and accountable procedures for granting concessions (as recommended by the Economic Governance Steering Committee) implemented
	The Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative completion point reached
Revival of economic growth	Gross domestic product growth recovers in line with poverty reduction strategy projections
Strengthening State authority and management of natural resources	Rubber concessions renegotiated for major plantations and regulatory policies in the rubber plantation sector implemented
	National Forestry Law implemented
	Environmental Protection Agency operational nationwide
	Kimberley Process Certification Scheme compliance functioning effectively and monitored

Governance and rule of law[c]	
Justice sector reform	**Pretrial case review mechanism established and functioning**
	Law reform commission functioning
	Judicial-training institute established
	Accountability mechanisms established for money paid or entrusted to courts
	Legal advisory services available in each county
	Legally qualified public defenders available in each county
	Comprehensive review of the traditional court/justice systems completed
	Increase in numbers of students graduating annually from the law school
	Significant increase in ability of courts to dispose their caseload on time and in accordance with the law
Corrections reform	**Deactivation of corrections staff: phase I — pensionable age staff (65 years) or 25 years of service; phase II — staff failing a written exam**
	Proposals for changes in penal law with respect to corrections submitted to the Government of Liberia
	500 staff trained and deployed
	Operational correctional facilities in every county
Promotion and protection of human rights	**Truth and Reconciliation Commission submits report to legislature, fulfilling mandate**
	Independent National Commission on Human Rights functioning
	National Human Rights Action Plan developed and implementation started
Reconciliation progressing	**Nationwide conflict management processes and training to address long-standing social divides**
	Community-based recovery and reintegration programmes available for unemployed youth in high security-risk areas
	Strengthened political party system

	Constitutional reform
	Enhanced legislative capacity to review and pass laws
National institutions strengthened	County administration operational nationwide
Anti-corruption strategy	Anti-Corruption Commission established
Civil Service reform	Civil Service code of conduct in place
	100 positions filled under the Senior Executive Service
	Civil service strength right-sized and service conditions improved
Infrastructure and basic services[c]	
Rehabilitation of transport network	Main strategic routes repaired and maintained
	Steps taken to become compliant with the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code
Health services expanded	Minimum health package expanded and provided by 70 per cent of health facilities
	Enhanced and equipped services provided by the 354 existing functional health facilities
	Increase in skilled health workers deployed nationwide by 40 per cent
Access to quality education	Renovation of 33 primary and 6 secondary schools; new construction of 37 primary and 4 secondary schools nationwide
	Increased school enrolment and completion rate of 5 per cent annually, particularly of girls, nationwide
	Number of qualified teachers in schools increased by 10 per cent annually

[a] Core benchmarks: markers to measure progress in the achievement of the mandate and conditions needed to ensure a security "steady-state"; security "steady-state" is defined as the point at which the national security services and agencies are fully operational and primarily sustained with the Government of Liberia's own resources.

[b] "Operational" is defined as the existence of functional capabilities, with clear command structures and management; transparent, accountable and appropriate organizational structures; conducting continuous skills-based training and retraining; and having adequate logistical facilities, including financial resources, materials and communications. These capabilities are underpinned by a core doctrine/vision and are judged as nationally sustainable in the long run.

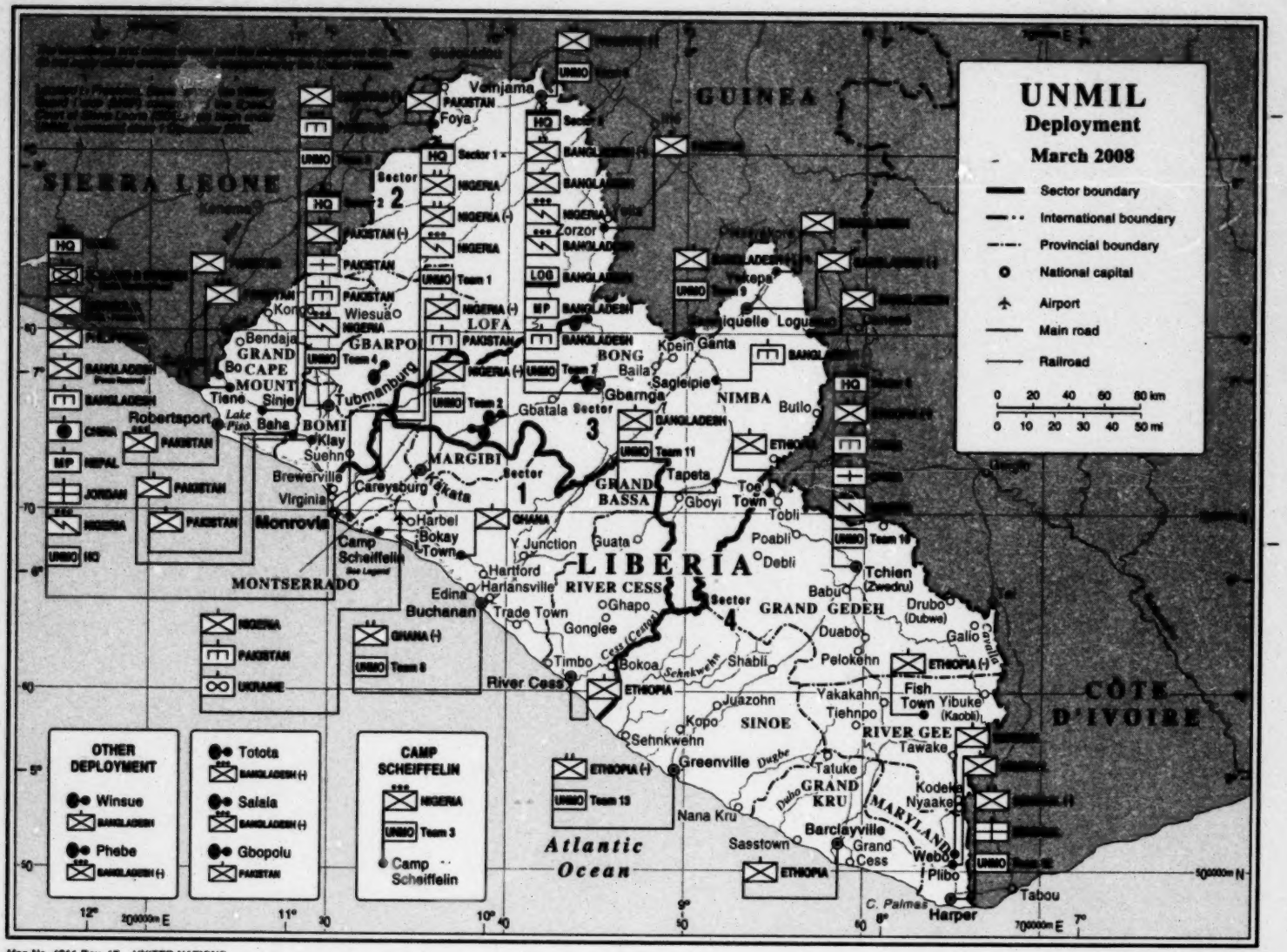
[c] Contextual benchmarks: conditions or factors that could potentially reignite violent conflict or interact with core benchmarks to undermine security.

Annex II

United Nations Mission in Liberia: military and civilian police strength (as at 1 March 2008)

Component	*Military*				*Police*
Country	*Military observers*	*Staff officer*	*Troops*	*Total*	*Civilian police*
Argentina	0	0	0	0	8
Bangladesh	18	11	2 782	2 811	30
Benin	3	1	0	4	0
Bolivia	3	1		4	0
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0	0	0	0	12
Brazil	0	3	0	3	0
Bulgaria	2	0	0	2	0
China	5	8	558	571	10
Croatia	0	5	0	5	0
Czech Republic	3	0	0	3	5
Denmark	3	0	0	3	0
Ecuador	2	1	0	3	0
El Salvador	3	0	0	3	4
Ethiopia	19	6	1 776	1 801	0
Egypt	5	0	0	3	1
Fiji	0	0	0	0	30
Finland	0	2	0	2	0
France	0	1	0	1	0
Gambia	2	0	0	2	24
Germany	0	0	0	0	5
Ghana	12	7	850	869	46
India	0	0	0	0	125
Indonesia	3	0	0	3	0
Jamaica	0	0	0	0	5
Jordan	7	8	115	130	146
Kenya	3	4	0	7	15
Kyrgyzstan	4	0	0	4	3
Malawi	0	0	0	0	14
Malaysia	10	0	0	10	0
Mali	4	1	0	5	0
Moldova	3	0	0	3	0
Mongolia	0	2	248	250	0
Montenegro	2	0	0	2	0
Namibia	1	2	0	3	4

Component	Military				Police
Country	Military observers	Staff officer	Troops	Total	Civilian police
Nepal	4	3	40	47	257
Nigeria	21	16	1 825	1 862	159
Norway	0	0	0	0	10
Pakistan	13	9	3 381	3 403	31
Paraguay	3	0	0	3	0
Peru	2	1	0	3	0
Philippines	0	5	165	170	34
Poland	2	0	0	2	3
Republic of Korea	1	1	0	2	0
Romania	3	0	0	3	0
Russian Federation	6	0	0	6	10
Rwanda	0	0	0	0	12
Samoa	0	0	0	0	8
Senegal	3	4	600	607	0
Serbia	4	0	0	4	6
Sri Lanka	0	0	0	0	10
Sweden	0	0	0	0	18
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	0	0	0	0	1
Togo	2	1	0	3	0
Turkey	0	0	0	0	26
Uganda	0	0	0	0	22
United Kingdom	0	3	0	3	0
Ukraine	3	1	300	304	14
Uruguay	0	0	0	0	1
United States of America	6	7	0	13	13
Yemen	0	0	0	0	7
Zambia	2	0	0	2	32
Zimbabwe	2	0	0	2	33
Total	**194**	**114**	**12 640**	**12 948**	**1 194**



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